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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001477

SIPDIS

USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL CONVENTION: READY OR NOT, HERE IT COMES

REF: A. RANGOON 1431

[B](#). RANGOON 1433

Classified By: DCM Ronald K. McMullen for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Burmese regime is quietly selecting delegates for a National Convention, the first step in implementing a new constitution, and may convene a body stacked with pro-SPDC delegates as early as January. The NLD says it won't participate absent broader negotiations and Burma's leading ethnic pro-democracy party says (for now) it won't participate without the NLD. However, many other ethnic nationalities now say they will send delegates. It may prove impossible for ASSK and the NLD to influence, much less negate, the contrived "democratic" outcome of the fast-running SPDC road map. END SUMMARY.

SPDC IS RUNNING THE SHOW

[1](#)2. (S) The SPDC is rapidly coming closer to accomplishing the first step in its "road map to democracy:" the holding of a National Convention to draft a new constitution. According to a well-placed GOB source, and corroborated by ethnic leaders, the SPDC may announce in late December that it will convoke a 700-member National Convention as early as January [1](#)2004. Based loosely on a formula used for the ill-fated 1993 National Convention, the SPDC in October began identifying and vetting nominees for eight "delegations," giving more weight this time around to groups under the direct influence of the regime:

- State Service Personnel (both military and civil service);
- National Races (both ethnic political leaders and the cease-fire groups);
- Peasants;
- Workers;
- Intelligentsia and Technocrats;
- Elder Statesmen (retired senior ranking civil servants and retired politicians);
- Political Parties (NLD, SNLD, National Unity Party, etc.);
- Elected Officials (from the 1990 elections);

CONVENTION DESIGN BY SPDC, INC.

[1](#)3. (S) According to our source, the SPDC is seeking to convoke a National Convention that is overwhelmingly pro-SPDC, including a 200-member delegation of military and civil servants. In a first, the regime's mass member organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), will also participate and a 130-strong "National Races" delegation will encompass the cease-fire groups (CFG) and ethnic nationalities vetted by the SPDC (Note: Many CFG leaders are involved in lucrative, regime-granted economic concessions. End Note.) Unlike the 1993 Convention, the regime will not give the "Elected Officials" delegation the power of the pen for drafting a constitution. Our sources tell us that the SPDC has already completed a draft and will expect the Convention to rubber stamp the final version.

[1](#)4. (C) Citing security concerns, the SPDC will hold the convention in an old Officer Training School in Hmawbi, twenty miles north of Rangoon. To underscore its seriousness, on Nov. 11 the SPDC published an unusual political notice in the government daily specifying as a top objective for the next Armed Forces anniversary in March "to accomplish successfully the seven-point State road map." Significantly, the notice also warned that the SPDC will use the people's militia to "crush all destructive elements" disturbing progress on the road map, an ominous threat to the NLD.

IS THE NLD IN, OR OUT?

[1](#)5. (C) For their part, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have not signaled any intent to participate in a National Convention. According to UN Special Rapporteur Pinheiro's account of his recent discussions with ASSK, the only acceptable road map is one that is negotiated between the SPDC and NLD (ref A). On Nov. 3 senior military intelligence official Brig Gen Kyaw Thein told the leaders of the cease-fire New Mon State Party (NMSP) that the NLD would be invited to join the National Convention as a political party. However, Kyaw Thein said he

had no idea whether the NLD, which won the 1990 elections, would also be included in the "Elected Officials" delegation.

#### ETHNICS PREPARED TO PLAY BALL

16. (C) In early November, the SPDC extended a National Convention invitation to the main cease-fire groups -- Mon, Kachin, and Karenni. All of the groups have RSVP'd "yes," but stipulated that they must be able to exercise their democratic rights in the process. In the meantime, the leading ethnic democratic opposition party, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), says it won't participate without the NLD being involved. SNLD leader Hkun Htun Oo, whose party garnered the second largest number of seats in 1990, also feels that the road map, as promulgated by the regime, does not meet SNLD requirements for political progress in Burma.

#### COMMENT: A MOVING TRAIN

17. (C) Intent on hosting a glorious ASEAN summit in 2006 as an "elected" government (ref B), the regime has cobbled together a road map that commences with a showcase National Convention. The SPDC may offer the NLD a deal to bring it into the Convention, or expect the party to request an invite on bent knee. If the NLD refuses to get on this moving train, the SPDC may feel it will be vindicated in the eyes of ASEAN. Regardless of the scenario, however, the regime has no intention to give the democratic opposition a voice in the drafting of a constitution. Once the convention starts, the SPDC will control the venue, the agenda, and the outcome. Time and room to maneuver is running out for the democratic opposition. END COMMENT.  
Martinez